



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information, Contact:
Abbi Pierce
Division of Disease Control
North Dakota Department of Health
Phone: 701.328.2378
E-mail: apierce@nd.gov

Increasing Cases of Whooping Cough Reported in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health today reported an increasing number of pertussis (whooping cough) cases in the state. As a result, the Department of Health is urging parents and caregivers to make sure their children are vaccinated, according to Abbi Pierce, Immunization Surveillance coordinator.

Since Nov. 25, 2008, 11 new cases of pertussis in eastern North Dakota have been reported to the Department of Health. Minnesota and South Dakota also are experiencing increased cases.

The number of pertussis cases usually peaks every three to five years. The most recent peak in North Dakota was in 2004, when 757 cases were reported. North Dakota saw 168 cases in 2005, 43 cases in 2006 and 14 cases in 2007.

The total to date for 2008 is 17 confirmed cases and three probable cases of pertussis. Almost 60 percent of the confirmed cases this year are unvaccinated children or children behind on their pertussis-containing vaccinations.

“Pertussis outbreaks highlight the importance of vaccination,” Pierce said. “Not only should infants and children be vaccinated against pertussis; adults and adolescents need to be vaccinated, as well, to make sure they don’t pass the disease to children who are too young to receive the vaccine.”

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a contagious disease that lasts for many weeks or months and can cause severe coughing with a “whooping” sound or coughing that leads to vomiting. The disease can be life-threatening for infants and is usually spread from adults to infants. Generally, the illness is less severe in those who are vaccinated.

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600 E. Boulevard Ave. Dept. 301, Bismarck, North Dakota 58505-0200
Phone: 701.328.2372 Fax: 701.328.4727 E-mail: health@nd.gov

Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

Pertussis is characterized by one or more of the following symptoms:

- Prolonged cough.
- Long spells of coughing with spasms.
- Coughing with a whooping sound.
- Coughing that leads to gagging or vomiting.

People who have any of the above symptoms should contact their health-care provider to be evaluated for whooping cough. **Anyone who does not have a cough does not need to be tested.** Individuals who think they have been exposed to a pertussis case should contact their health-care provider as soon as possible to find out if they should be put on antibiotics.

One of the most important ways to prevent the disease is vaccination. Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP) should be administered routinely to infants at 2, 4, 6 and 15 to 18 months of age, and a booster dose of DTaP should be given at ages 4 to 6. DTaP is required to attend school or day care.

Tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) is routinely recommended for adolescents ages 11 and 12 and is required for all adolescents entering middle school. Tdap also is recommended for adolescents ages 13 to 18 and adults.

In an effort to protect infants from pertussis, the North Dakota Department of Health provides Tdap vaccine for new parents or guardians, child-care providers, and fathers-to-be. Vaccinating adults may reduce the risk of transmission to infants and other susceptible people. For more information about where to receive the vaccine, individuals should contact their health-care provider or local public health unit.

People who have questions or concerns should contact the NDDoH Division of Disease Control at 701.328.2378 or toll-free at 800.472.2180. In addition, a fact sheet is available at www.ndhealth.gov.

For more information about this issue, members of the media may contact Abbi Pierce, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

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